UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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SURVEY OF WINTER WATERFOWL CONDITIONS NOW UNDERWAY

A continent-wide waterfowl survey to determine the conditions of habitat and the distribution of wintering ducks and geese is underway, the Department of the Interior said today.

The annual survey, which is coordinated by Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, is a cooperative project requiring approximately 1,500 wildlife observers from State game and fish departments and the Bureau.

Because the areas covered by the survey are extensive, aerial observations play an important role. Approximately 150 airplanes, including many from the Armed Forces and the Coast Guard, are used in covering over 80,000 miles normally flown during the winter survey. An additional 100,000 miles are covered by observers in automobiles and boats.

John S. Gottschalk, Director of the Bureau, emphasized that birds observed during the winter survey are not a good indication of the overall waterfowl population.

"Breeding ground surveys in summer are the reliable means for determining populations for most of the ducks, while the winter survey provides useful information about population trends of some species, as distinct from population estimates," Director Gottschalk said. "Also, the winter survey is not as reliable for some species as for others, partly because weather conditions govern the ability of observers to count birds. Nevertheless, this survey does have value in managing a few species of waterfowl for which breeding ground survey techniques have yet to be perfected and for geese whose far-north breeding grounds are not covered by the summer survey."

Primary waterfowl wintering areas of Mexico and Canada, as well as in all the States, are covered by the winter survey. Although the majority of North America's waterfowl winters in the Southern States, areas such as the Columbia Basin in the Pacific Northwest, the Chesapeake Bay on the Atlantic coast, backwaters along the Mississippi and other large rivers, and units of the National Wildlife Refuge System are host to great numbers of waterfowl in winter.

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